

Summary

Proposed improvements to the intersection of Henderson Road/Old Coach Road and Upper Pike Creek Road at Pike Creek in Mill Creek Hundred, New Castle County, Delaware, will adversely affect two historical archaeological sites eligible for the National Register, which were identified during Phase I and Phase II investigations in 1985 and 1986. The present data recovery project involved conducting detailed historical and archaeological research on these sites and setting them within a broader contextual framework, which was developed specifically for the project.

The Ward/Little Farmstead Site [7NC-D-203] is a small Piedmont farm established by the Springer family before 1796. The inventory and sale of the movable property of Jeremiah, the last of the Springer family, in 1849 provides a wealth of information about the farm during that time. Between 1850 and 1860, the farm's value greatly increased, and it remained a successful operation into the 20th century. Archaeological investigations showed that the extant stone ruins of a barn, other buildings, farmhouse and springhouse all date to the period of improvement after 1850. A large, in-filled depression located beneath the stone foundations was probably the site of the log house that was documented in the first half of the 19th century. The in-fill also contained an artifact assemblage consistent with the Springer occupation of the site. Comparison with other archaeologically studied farmsteads in New Castle County showed many common patterns of building evolution, trash disposal and proxemics. One noteworthy feature of the Ward/Little farmhouse is its apparently small size, which is anomalous for an owner-occupied farm.

The Woodward/Trump/Broadbent/Taylor Mill and Raceway Site [7NC-D-202] was only one of a complex network of mills and raceway systems in multiple ownership on Pike Creek in the first three quarters of the 19th century. This local development is set within a broader historical research context of water powered milling for northern Delaware. At least one adjacent gristmill appears to have been an early example of the adoption of Oliver Evans' integrated milling system. The exact date of construction of the Woodward/Trump/Broadbent/Taylor mill is uncertain, but it was probably built in the 1819-1821 period. By 1843, the mill was operating as a carpet factory, which continued to operate until shortly after the Civil War. Archaeologically, the site proved to be less informative than had been anticipated. Although the stone rectangular foundation of the mill building was located, it lay at the extreme southern limit of the project area and only its largely rebuilt northern wall was accessible. To the east of the building, a series of poorly preserved features appear to represent elements of the water control system. These were too fragmentary for any substantial conclusions to be drawn about the development of waterpower technology at the site.

Limited additional investigations on a terrace location in the western portion of the project area, and in the area of a documented blacksmith shop at the eastern limits of proposed construction, were both inconclusive.